

Maennerchor Building
102 West Michigan Street
Indianapolis
Marion County
Indiana

HABS No. IN-100

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49-IND,
33-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

MAENNERCHOR BUILDING

HABS No. IN-100

Location: 102 West Michigan Street, southwest corner of West Michigan and Illinois Street, Indianapolis, Marion County, Indiana. The main entrance is on the west side of Illinois Street.

Present Owner: American States Insurance Company, 540 North Meridian Street, Indianapolis, Indiana.

Present Occupant: Vacant as of 1974.

Significance: This building, with its unusual eclectic combination of German and American stylistic detailing, served as a musical and social club for the large German-American community of Indianapolis.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1906.
2. Architect: Adolph Scherrer. Scherrer was an architect from St. Gall, Switzerland. He studied in Vienna before coming to Indianapolis in 1872. He worked in the office of Edwin May before setting up his own practice. (Burns, "Early Architects" p. 199) Other Scherrer buildings include the state bank at Evansville and the City Hospital and the Elks club in Indianapolis.
3. Original and subsequent owners: The building is located on lots 5, 6, 7 of George W. Miller's subdivision of donation lands of the city of Indianapolis. The following references are in the Marion County Deed Records:

1906	Deed of Feb. 27, 1906, recorded in Book 398, page 120. The Maennerchor Hall Association purchased the property from Indiana Trust Company for \$30,000.
1946	Deed of Feb. 26, 1946, recorded in Volume 1205, page 259. Indiana University purchased the property from the Maennerchor Hall Association.
1974	Deed of May 31, 1974. The American States Life Insurance Company purchased the property from Indiana University.

4. Additions and alterations: The building appears largely in its original condition from the two streets it faces, although in 1953 a lecture hall was added to an adjacent townhouse on the north and a passage-link was built from the Maennerchor. The flared tent roof of the east tower was removed in the 1960's.

In the interior a great deal of change was made during the time the building was used as Indiana University's law school. The balcony of the concert hall was closed off to form a lecture hall. The seats were removed and wood risers added. In the auditorium itself the stage was removed and many of the superb brass lighting fixtures were removed.

The first floor rehearsal room was divided by partitions into a number of rooms. An early photograph shows the room with its white paneling surmounted by a series of painted wall decorations which reached up to the ceiling. The kniepe (drinking room) adjacent to the main auditorium was also partitioned into a number of rooms. An early photograph shows it was a long narrow space fully paneled in dark wood and lit by a number of heavy metal electrical fixtures with polygonal globes. Brackets on either side held mugs. The ceiling had beams supported on corbel figures and the plaster between the beams was painted dark with stenciled decoration. The fireplace at the end of the hall with its grotesque herm figures and mat green tiles, was removed and taken to the new law school when the law school moved. Since 1970 the building has been vacant and has suffered from neglect and vandalism.

B. Historical Context:

1. The Maennerchor was one of the major institutions of the large and influential German population of Indianapolis and one of the most important musical organizations in this area of the county. The Maennerchor was founded in 1854 by a group of Germans who had come to the United States after the 1848 revolutions in Europe. The first concert was given in 1855 and throughout the rest of the century musical events were held in various locations in Indianapolis. First the organization built a two story frame building at the southeast corner of Court Square. In 1874 they rented the old Union Hall and in 1878 they moved to another rented building, the Old City Hall. By 1906, with the completion of their new building, the Maennerchor was at the height of its glory. The building joined the already existing Athenaeum, originally Das deutsches Haus, as the cultural center of the German community. The building offered music, excellent food, drink (especially beer) and what was held to be the first roof garden in the city. To the concerts came

many of the greatest artists of their time: the Flonzaley String Quartet, Pablo Cassals, Joseph Szigiti, Vladamir Horowitz, and the Budapest String Quartet.

In 1936 the society gave its first concert in the Athenaeum and soon thereafter severed all association with the Maennerchor Building. Later, during the 1940's, the building was used first as a Servicemen's Center and later as a night club. Then, in 1946, the Indiana University Law School moved into the building. The law school occupied the building until 1970.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Information:

1. Architectural Character: The building exhibits an interesting eclectic combination of Germanic and American detailing.
2. Condition of fabric: Good. There have been numerous revisions in the interior space, most of them apparently additive to the original fabric. The building has been empty for several years and the ceiling paint is badly peeled.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: Approximately 94' wide (front) by 150'-6" long. The building is 3 stories high and has an irregular rectangular shape.
2. Foundations: Limestone with rock face.
3. Walls: The brick exterior wall is laid in a plain stretcher bond. The brick is divided vertically by two horizontal limestone string courses at the first and second floor window sills. The brick is plain below the first string course, then has a horizontal banded pattern of four protruding brick courses alternating with two revealed courses up to the second floor string course. Above the second string course the brick has a plain surface again except for the quoin brick corners.
4. Structural system, framing: Brick bearing walls and steel beams and trusses.
5. Porches, stoops, bulkheads, etc.: There is a roof deck at the third level on the south side. Walls on three sides are brick with chimney on the west that has a limestone fountain and trim built in to its surface. The south side has an elaborate pierced and carved limestone railing with heavy limestone piers.

Vertical light standards once topped each pier but have been removed. The deck surface is presently built-up roofing. Access is from doors on east and west.

6. Chimneys: The chimney west of the roof deck pierces the roof at the cornice line, which is carried across its face. Above is a brick string course with a cluster of pilasters individually corbelled out to support the stone cap.

7. Openings:

- a. Doorways and doors: The main entrance on Illinois Street has three openings at the first floor, each deeply revealed in moulded limestone surrounds with segmental arches at the top. Large and elaborately carved cartouche decorations rise from the arch centers. Above are pedestal bases with horizontal carved and lettered stone panels between. The entry doors are paired wood with a single large light in each with a moulded panel below and a stained glass arched top transom above.

Old photographs show cantilevered metal brackets supported torch-like bases with light spheres above and at the side of each doorway. Decorated metal flag poles sprung at an angle from the stone band between first and second floor and were restrained by elaborately wrought metal brackets. All metal work has been removed.

The stone entrance on W. Michigan Street has simple squared pilasters with bases and capitals on each side and a half elliptical transom. An entablature on top supports a simple pediment with elaborately carved infill.

- b. Windows and shutters: Stone surrounds with the jambs quoined into the brick masonry. The first floor windows have flat lintels, and wood double hung 1 x 1 light sash are paired with stone mullions and have 6 light transoms above. The second floor windows have segmental moulded arches with curious irregular quoined jambs. Two double hung wood sash are on either side of a wider fixed sash with transom and glazing in a geometrical design of translucent and stained glass. Above the main entrance, there are three second-story stained glass windows, having limestone surrounds with pilasters and keystone arches supporting a single entablature.

8. Roof:

- a. Shape and covering: The primary gable roof runs east-west and is intersected by two perpendicular lower gables at right angles on the south-east and south-west. Roofing is red Ludowicki tile.

- b. Cornices, eaves: The eaves are moulded limestone with built-in gutters and metal leaders. The parapets at three of the four gable ends are limestone capped with elaborate carved peak stones and have ball and base caps at the top of the brick quoins.
- c. Dormers, cupolas, towers: The tower at the front corner between the main block and the eastern wing is a three story octagon set into the building so that the octagon is fully expressed only at the top. The top has a carved limestone band with cartouches surmounted by figure busts and flowering garlands. A flared tile-covered tent roof with a slim spire was replaced in the 1960's with a flat roof.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:

- a. First floor: A vestibule leads to a large entrance hall or lobby with two open stairs to the second floor. An off-axis central corridor in the main block opens on side rooms and ends at a large room which was originally the rehearsal room. A small passage on the north side of the corridor gives access through a link to an adjoining building. An opening on the south of the lobby gives access to an open stair (with landings in the octagonal tower) and to the original Ladies' Parlor and Dining Room.
- b. Second floor: The main stairs open to the second floor lobby which then leads into the auditorium with the proscenium and stage area opposite (the stage has been removed). An arcade on the south with wood slat roll-up doors opens on a narrow room the length of the auditorium. Doors on the south of the lobby open onto a stair and two adjoining rooms. A long corridor to the west gives access to a series of rooms and cubicles which are subdivisions of the original kniepe (drinking room).
- c. Third floor: The east stair hall opens north to a lecture room with riser seating (formerly the auditorium balcony) and south to four rooms (originally the Billiard Room). A pair of doors on the west leads to the former roof garden and doors on the opposite side of the deck lead to stairs with four rooms on one side and one on the other.

- 2. Stairways: Two main stairs on the north and south sides of the lobby have closed stringers and rise one flight in unequal right-angled flights with two landings each. All exposed components

including lobby paneling are marble. Roman doric columns of white marble are on each side of the first stair flight. The second floor protective railing is very substantial and made up of pierced and carved wood. The east and west stairs go the third floor and are metal with open stringers. Treads are white marble and landings are octagonal white tile.

3. Flooring: First floor flooring is white hexagonal mosaic tile. The second and third floors have wood plank flooring with a linoleum overlay in the auditorium.
 4. Walls and ceiling finish: Plaster painted except for exposed painted brick at the exterior walls of the third floor rooms, which also have hung acoustical ceiling on runners and vinyl covered moveable wall panels.
 5. Doorways and doors: Mostly wood, 4-panel doors in 3 tiers or with a large single light and two wood panels below.
 6. Special decorative features: There is a great deal of moulding on walls and ceiling, with the lobby and auditorium ceiling richly embellished. Muted frescoes remain in the tympanums above the auditorium doors and windows. There is a large fireplace in the second floor room south of the tower with its tile facing, hearth and heavy carved darkwood mantel with carved brackets and sloping hood still intact.
 7. Notable hardware. None.
 8. Mechanical equipment: There is a boiler and room convectors. All wiring is concealed.
- D. Site and surroundings:
1. General setting: The building is on a corner site in the downtown area. There is an alley on the rear (west side) of the building. The area is dominated by 3-6 story buildings but a parking lot on the other side of Illinois Street combined with the building's corner location makes the building very visible.
 2. Historic landscape design: None.
 3. Outbuildings: None, although a building to the north has been linked to the building via a passageway.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- A. Original Architectural Drawing: Original drawings were part of the collection of Indiana University, but could not be located as of 1974.

Full size copies of these drawings are being transmitted concurrently to the Library of Congress as Field Records. Some have been photocopied and are indexed in the index to photographs. Others which have not been photocopied include:

"Plan of Roof", "Detail of Finish for Hall", "West Elevation", "North Elevation", "Steel & Iron Details", "Details of Trusses for Main Roof", "Detail of Service Stair", "Detail of Columns", "Front Elevation Michigan Street Entrance", "Revised Detail of Trusses A-H", "Plan of Third Floor."

B. Early views: In collection of Indiana Historical Society.

C. Bibliography:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

Davisson, Mrs. David M., National Register of Historic Places Nomination, 1974.

2. Secondary and published sources:

Burns, Lee, "Early Architects and Builders of Indiana",
Publications of the Indiana Historical Society, Vol. XI, no. 3.

Dunn, Jacob P., Greater Indianapolis, Indianapolis, 1910.

Indianapolis News, June 6, 1905, Feb. 18, 1907, March 15, 1907.

Keller, Josef, Festschrift Zur Feier des goldenen Jubilums des Indianapolis Maennerchor, Indianapolis, 1904.

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August 1974

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July, 1984